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ABSTRACT

A research study on the learning effects of women's history on about 500 pupils throughout the Netherlands aged between 14 and 16 posed the question "How does women's history contribute to the gender-identity of girls?" Eleven classes (224 students) were taught women's history and 11 classes (273 students) were taught "traditional" history using teaching kits compiled for the research study. The learner report methodology, which required the students to write about what they had learned from the history lessons, was used to determine the research results. The study found that more girls than boys appreciated the women's history lessons. The girls' reports revealed mainly neutral or positive learning experiences, which was supported by their answers to the question "Did you enjoy women's history?" The study concluded, however, that despite the girls' positive responses to the women's history lessons, further research shows that a subject relating specifically to the needs and interests of girls and women tends to lose status and results in stereotyping. Because of the dilemma, incorporating women's studies into regular course materials and curriculum becomes important. A 23-item bibliography is included. (LP)

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GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF
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Dr. G.T.M. ten Dam

Suffragettes in the Curriculum: Girls' Perception of Women's Histor as a Subject-Matter In Secondary Schools

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Suffragettes in the Curriculum: Girls' Perception of Women's History as a Subject-Matter In Secondary Schools

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1. Introduction

The Netherlands is certainly not one of the most emancipated countries. The integration of women on the labour market and, for example, state support for child-care are discouraging. In one respect though, it is way ahead. Nowhere else in the world has women's history been a compulsory examination subject for all secondary schools pupils.[1] Under the heading 'Continuity and change', over 40,000 pupils studied the position of women in preparation for their final written examinations in history in 1990. About 1500 teachers were involved and the experiment was repeated in 1991.

The importance of women's history in secondary education was supported by various arguments. On a social level, it was argued that its importance lay in making apparent the role played by women in the past and the reappraisal of that role. Moreover, gender differences in social behavior are a subject of discussion within women's history (Beetsma, 1989; Grever, 1991). On an individual level, the introduction of women's history would result in girls identifying more with the past and, partly as a result, having a better understanding of our present day society based on gender-inequality and their own position in that society as women.

The evaluation results of The National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO) show that in 1990 girls performed slightly better than boys in this specific examination subject, whereas boys outperformed girls in the second examination topic 'World War II', a traditional subject, (Kreeft, 1991). From this point of view, women's history served the interests of girls (see also Kneedler, 1988). However, the impact of teaching women's history on the attitudes of girls towards history and, in particular, to themselves as women is unknown.

In this paper I will present some of the results of a research project subsidized by the Ministry of Education & Science on the learning effects of the subject of women's history on pupils in the pre-examination classes of secondary education (ten Dam, Farkas-Teekens & van Loosbroek, 1991).[2] The research question dealt with in this paper reads as follows:

[1] In the Netherlands, two topics are chosen every year for the final written examination in history and political science, to be taken by all history pupils in secondary schools, ranging from vocational education up to the highest level of general secondary education. Guidelines are laid down for the subject-matter to be used for each topic by a small group of professional historians, advised and responsible to the Ministery of Education and Science. 'The subject-matter is published two years before the examination take place leaving enough time for preparation of teachers, publishers of examination course books and the committee which formulates the examination questions.' (Grever, 1991, p.66).

[2] Although teaching methods constitute an important part of the research, this aspect is not dealt with in this paper.

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'How does women's history contribute to the gender-identity of girls?'. At school, girls and boys are confronted with several conflicting discourses on gender (see e.g. Davies, 1989; Volman, ten Dam & van Eck, 1993) and it is partly within this context that a gender-identity develops. What is unique to women's history is that it offers explicit meanings, possibly new, pertaining to women, femininity and gender. Depending on how girls interpret these meanings, they can influence the gender-identity of girls. From an pedagogical point of view, it is this assumed influence of the introduction of women's history in secondary education on the way in which girls see themselves as a woman that is particularly important.[3] Given the limited experience of teaching women's history, this project has to be seen as exploratory. The only outcome we predicted was that girls would like women's history and that they like it more than boys. Before describing the organization and structure of the research and presenting the research results, I will give a brief outline of the introduction of women's history in secondary education and discuss the theoretical background of the research project.

2. The introduction of women's history in Dutch secondary schools

'Women's history' was introduced in the Netherlands in 1978 by a group of feminist history students. Ten years later it had developed into a multifaceted, productive academic field. Practitioners of women's history have always put a great deal of energy into translating their research results to education and for the interested general public. The most successful activity in translating women's history to education has been the contact with a committee installed in 1984 by the Deputy Minister of Education to revise the final examinations in history and political science. This committee was not indifferent to the arguments for women's history, which was evident in its first recommendation to the Deputy Minister of Education. It suggested that the National Final Written Examination in 1989 should include a topic from women's history. Deputy Minister Ginjaar-Maas acted on this recommendation in the 1990 and 1991 examinations. The chairperson of the committee supported the choice of a topic from women's history by, among other things, referring to the government policy on equal opportunities in education. (See Grever 1991 for a historiography of the acceptance of women's history into the Dutch history exam ations.)

The outline of a women's history examination was developed by a group of nine specialists in women's history from different universities. The description of the subject-matter for the final examination is entitled 'Continuity and change. The position of women in the Netherlands and the United States of America, 1929-1969'. The theme is centred on three issues which are dealt with in detail in history lessons: the economic recession of the thirties, the Second World War, and the development of modern society. The position of women is discussed in relation to three aspects in each of these issues: family, work and politics. The question of continuity and change is a focal point in this: 'To what extent did the position of women change in this period'? A comparison is made between developments in women's emancipation in the Netherlands and in the United States in order to stimulate pupils to reflect on these issues: gender-related patterns are neither the result of historical coincidences, but structural to society, nor are they indifferent to specific contexts. The emphasis is on women within this framework but nevertheless pupils do need to have an understanding of such concepts as 'crisis politics', 'equal treatment' and 'secularization'. Continuity and change in relation to women is therefore emphatically associated with the processes and structures in society as a whole.

The introduction of women's history in secondary education was not achieved without a

[3] Women's history can also have an influence on the gender-identity of boys. However, I have only dealt with the gender-identity of girls in this paper.

struggle. Much doubt was expressed in the education world on the availability of suitable teaching materials. Was women's history sufficiently academic and how was the translation to secondary education to be achieved? Moreover, should history teachers have to start teaching a subject which in many cases they had never really studied in any detail? In response to the objections raised, background material was collected (Grever & Wijers, 1988) and in-service training courses for teachers were given throughout the country.

3. Equality and difference

I already mentioned the fact that the introduction of a topic from women's history in the final examinations in history and political science was supported by reference to the government policy on equal opportunities in education. The objectives of the equal educational opportunities policy of the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science are usually summarized as the elimination of sex-stereotyping, the reappraisal of feminine qualities and the redress of disadvantages.[4] The policy was a response to the realization that girls were not benefiting adequately from education and that this was reflected in their position in society later on (Ministry of Education and Science, 1979). In the implementation of the objectives, however, the main emphasis was on disadvantage in the sense of lagging behind: the idea that girls must qualify themselves for as favourable a position as possible on the labour market, i.e. the same as boys, framed the general policy on equal opportunities. The objective of Dutch government policy of 'reappraisal of the feminine qualities' has hardly gained any ground (Volman, ten Dam & van Eck, 1993).

The introduction of women's history into secondary education is one of the few attempts to implement not only the objective of redressing disadvantage but also the objective of reappraisal. While in most historical narratives women were either left out or stereotyped as spinsters and housewives (Grever, 1991, p.67), women's history firstly paid explicit attention to women in 'masculine' fields. The teaching materials focus on women who have played an important role in politics, the arts and intellectual life (e.g. suffragettes, female writers). Secondly, women's history aims at reappraising domains traditionally ascribed to women; they are relevant to society and they are worth studying (e.g. the family, birth-control). The focus is on 'private' life.

The twin concepts of disadvantage and reappraisal in the Dutch equal educational opportunities policy can be seen as a variation of twin concepts in women's studies which have been an important subject of discussion, namely *equality and difference* (see e.g. Scott, 1988; ten Dam & Volman, 1991). The objective of 'redressing disadvantage' can be regarded as the aspiration to equality. The message to pupils is: women can achieve the same as men. 'Reappraisal' can be seen as a request for the positive side of gender difference to be considered. Men and masculinity are not the only way of measuring 'the emancipation of women'. Pupils are encouraged to see the experiences and culture of women as different from those of men. Nel Noddings (1992) calls this emphasis the 'different voice' manifesting itself in social studies.

Under the influence of recent debates within women's studies, however, women's history is trying to achieve more. The interrelationship between the concepts of 'equality' and 'difference' has been identified in women's studies. Both concepts presuppose each other in the sense that the one has no meaning without the other. On the one hand, thinking about equality and inequality is based on thinking about differences. Without the existence of gender differences, it would be absurd to think about the effects thereof. On the other hand, the concept of 'difference' is needed to attain a certain type of equality in order to prevent an equality based exclusively on men's terms (Hermsen & van Lenning, 1991, p. 19-20). Equality (disadvantage) and difference (reappraisal) only appear to be antipodal.

[4] The term 'disadvantage' is a translation of the Dutch term 'achterstand', which also means 'lagging behind'. Usually, it is used in a less political sense than the term disadvantage.

Femininity and masculinity are not intrinsically the same or indeed different. The meaning of 'gender' varies according to the specific context. Femininity, masculinity and the unequal relationship between men and women are social manifestations which can assume a different form again and again (see e.g. Malson et al., 1989). By searching for what is called the 'construction of gender' within specific historical contexts and within historiography (see e.g. Scott, 1986), women's history strives to make pupils sensitive to the way in which meaning, past and present, is given to femininity and masculinity and how this meaning has changed. By showing, for example, that in our society the dichotomy man/masculinity and woman/femininity almost always takes the form of hierarchical oppositions in the sense of better-worse, superior-inferior etc, pupils can be challenged to reflect on their own gender-identity.

To summarize, three levels can be distinguished in the way in which the position of women is dealt with in the subject women's history in secondary education. At the first level, the role of women in areas traditionally ascribed to men is made apparent. The second level looks at the value attributed by society to the domain of women. The changing meanings of gender-differences are examined at the third level: femininity as a social construction.

The question 'how did women's history contribute to the gender-identity of girls?' can now be more clearly defined within the framework of the differentiation made above. I want to know how individual pupils have interpreted the different approaches to looking at the position of women. Do they make sense to them and if so, how? I will examine the extent to which each of the three levels is evident in the individual interpretation of pupils. I conceive the individual interpretation of pupils on the position of women/men and femininity/masculinity as an element of gender-identity.

The fact that education contributes to the gender-identity of pupils is, although not unique to women's history, particulary relevant to this subject. Maria Grever (1991) calls historiography a political necessity in the process of constructing an identity. This refers not only to the identity of a country or a group, but to the identity of individuals as well. 'Individuals and groups do not find their identity in "the" historical facts, but form their identity in a reconstruction of the past into the present with views about the future' (...) *Which* identifying features are emphasized, *which* players are chosen for the historical stage and *how* they are presented, depends on the interests of the historian.' (p.67). In contrast to mainstream historiography, women's history focuses on gender as a very important identifying feature.

4. The structure and organization of the research

Teaching materials

Some teachers did not agree with the introduction of women's history as a compulsory examination subject. A letter from a pupil published in the periodical 'Vernieuwing' [Innovation] outlines how her history teacher treated the subject (van Eerten, 1990). She quoted word for word ten statements made by the teacher during the first lesson. For example, 'Feminists have pushed through this subject and the Minister has agreed just to get rid of them', 'The language in this book (recommended reading for the 1990 examination) is sometimes rather radical and unrealistic, I am going to try to suppress this as much as possible', 'This is not really important enough to be a final examination subject'.

Realistically, one has to expect that the subject will not always be taught with the same enthusiasm and commitment. The question must then be asked, with no disrespect to the work that has been done, whether the innovation intended has been fully explored from the point of view of women's studies. To do justice to the desired innovation, my fellow researchers and I worked with a group of highly motivated teachers. We

compiled teaching kits for women's history and 'traditional' history[5] which could be used in their lessons, the pre-examination classes of junior general secondary education and senior general secondary education[6].

The subject-matter covers developments in the Netherlands in relation to events in the rest of Europe and in the United States during the years 1900-1929. Imperialism and colonialism are not dealt with. The restriction in coverage during the period specified complies with the guidelines laid down for the women's history section for the period 1929-1969 of the national written examination in history in 1990 and 1991. Common topics and themes in the period in question are discussed which, without exception, are dealt with in the standard approach to history, e.g. World War I, industrialization, the right to vote and pillarization[7]. The socio-economic, political and administrative, and socio-cultural aspects of developments are dealt with. This is true of both 'traditional' history and women's history. Unique to women's history is thus merely the attention paid to the position of women. The process of radical change evident in every facet of society at this time is central to the way in which the subject-matter is dealt with.

The three levels at which attention can be paid to the position of women are all present in the women's history teaching materials that we compiled. We have presented women in 'masculine' domains, we have examined those areas of daily life traditionally ascribed to women, and we have discussed gender as a social construction. We have tried to clarify the latter by paying attention to the changes in meaning of the concept of femininity over the years. The emergence and development of new 'women's professions' are discussed for example, as well as changes in women's appearance, the rationalization of household duties and the example of Hollywood films, *without* these changes being placed in the context of greater equality of the sexes, whether that equality has been realized or not.

Research design

As part of the research, we worked with 11 classes who were taught women's history (224 pupils) and 11 classes 'traditional' history (273 pupils). Sixteen teachers throughout the Netherlands participated in the research (497 pupils, 291 girls and 206 boys aged between fourteen and sixteen). The teaching kits we used covered eight lessons for junior general secondary education pupils and eleven for senior general secondary education, which

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[5] We conceptualized 'traditional' history as a historiography in which gender as an identifying feature of society and individuals has been ignored.

[6] Pursuant to the Secondary Education Act there are two main branches of secondary education in the Netherlands. The first comprises general secondary education and pre-university education. The second comprises pre-vocational and vocational education. General secondary education is provided in the following forms:

- senior general secondary education (havo); length of course 5 years, aged 12 to 17;
- junior general secondary education (mavo); length of course 4 years, aged 12 to 16.

The difference between junior general secondary education and senior general secondary education in the teaching materials is twofold. Firstly, the scope of the senior general secondary education material is more extensive owing to the inclusion of a chapter on demographic developments. In the senior general secondary education version the problem of continuity and change is raised, whilst the junior general secondary education book only deals with the process of change. Secondly, the senior general secondary education questions and assignments are aimed more at interpretation than those of the junior general secondary education. The classes from both types of school were divided equally between the two research groups.

[7] Pillarization (verzuiling) is a differentiation within society whereby the population is divided into ideologically based social segments each with its own schools, societies, political parties, broadcasting organizations, newspapers, hospitals etc. It is a vertical differentiation running through all the social classes (horizontal stratification). During the first half of the 20th century, Dutch society became divided into a Roman Catholic 'pillar', a Protestant 'pillar', which was further divided internally, and a neutral 'pillar'.

meant that every class, regardless of the type of school, worked with the kits for a continuous period of four weeks. The teachers were recruited via professional journals and informal contacts. Before the research began, the teachers received written instructions and a one day course on how to use the teaching materials. Data on implementation was collected via the teachers' log books and one lesson of every class was observed. The careful selection of the teachers participating in the research - only teachers with an interest in the problem were asked to participate - means that the generalisation of the research results cannot be assumed.

In order to investigate the appreciation of history and women's history by girls and boys, we asked the pupils to fill in a questionnaire after the experiment. The research question, 'How did women's history contribute to the gender-identity of girls?', was answered with help of the learner report methodology (see the next section).

Parity between the classes taught women's history and those taught 'traditional' history was ensured as far as possible by excluding classes from the research that had already been taught women's history in one form or another. On the basis of background information on pupils collected immediately before the research began, we could conclude that the two groups did not differ in terms of achievement in history and no significant differences in pupils' backgrounds were evident (gender, age, ethnic origin, parents' education, parents' occupation, the importance placed on school and on enjoying school).

The learner report

The research made use of the learner report methodology which was developed with a view to evaluating educational objectives (de Groot, 1974). It has gradually been used more and more as a means of evaluating education in the widest sense: what/how do pupils report on their educational activities? The key question of the learner report is always: what have you learnt (in this course, about this subject, etc.). In the version of the learner report used, pupils were asked to answer the question above in the form of so-called learning effect sentences. Pupils were asked to formulate sentences beginning with 'I have learnt that' or 'I have noticed/discovered that'. An open question permits pupils to form their own opinions on and about the subject-matter dealt with. Not only the learning experiences which had been intended, but precisely those *not* intended, the unexpected learning experiences, become apparent in this way.

The introduction of the questionnaire given to pupils read as follows:

> 'We would like to know what you have learnt about the subject history in the *last few weeks*.
> We are *not* interested in what the history teacher thinks you should have learnt.
> We are also *not* interested in all the topics which have been dealt with in the subject history during the last few weeks.
> What we want to know is what *you yourself* have learnt. What do you think is important?
> It is certainly not easy to write down everything you have learnt just like that. So we are going to suggest a way of making this easier for you.
> Write down sentences on this piece of paper which begin with:
> I have learnt that.....or
> I have discovered that.....or
> I have noticed that.....'

A number of measures were taken to ensure that 'the pupils' perspective' could indeed be expressed when questions were asked in this way. In the first place, the questionnaire was not introduced or supervised by the teacher, but by a researcher whom the pupils did not know. As every hint of selection or prejudice via the learner report was removed, it can be assumed that the pupils did not give a deliberately distorted picture. Moreover, the learner report was not preceded by questions on pupils' knowledge. This was also a way of trying to minimize the 'teachers' perspective'.

Writing a learner report is no sinecure for pupils. In general, pupils in secondary education are not taught to reflect on learning experiences. The level of difficulty of the learner report did not preclude a high response. This was 97% on average, and was more or less equally divided between girls and boys and between the two different research groups (women's history and 'traditional' history). The learner report produced a total of 948 learning experiences. This was an average of 1.9 per respondent. There was a slight difference between girls and boys in this respect, with girls formulating an average of 2.1 learning effect sentences, boys 1.7.

The learner report has proved to be a sufficiently reliable and valid research method for identifying learning effects which otherwise would not have been apparent, e.g. by means of tests (see van der Kamp, 1980; van Kesteren, 1989; Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 1990). As the learning report methodology is not very well-known, I will discuss in detail below the way in which the analysis was carried out.

The learner reports were analyzed as follows. We counted every learning *sentence* formulated by a pupil as one learning experience. What was understood as a learning effect sentence, and thus as a learning experience in the research, was:

- every complete sentence, regardless of length and content, beginning with 'I have learnt/noticed/discovered that';
- every complete sentence, regardless of length and content, which, although it does not begin with 'I have learnt/noticed/discovered that', can be assumed to have been meant as a learning effect sentence by the pupil (e.g., 'Pillarization involves...') Such sentences are often preceded by a hyphen. An exception to this rule are those sentences which were an explanation of a previous learning effect sentence. (Example: 'I have discovered that people were pleased when the war broke out. They thought it would solve certain problems'. Or, 'I have learnt that in the past women were not allowed much freedom. They were certainly not allowed short skirts, short hair, to go to the cinema etc.')

Quantifying the different types of learning experiences leaves a great deal of information unused. The positive and the negative meaning of a learning experience, for example, can be lost in this way. It is the pupils' precise choice of words which can elucidate on how attempts have been made to give meaning to what has been taught. How has the subject-matter acquired meaning, especially for girls? What kind of connection have they made between what has been taught and the social context in which they live, both in and outside school? How have girls interpreted what they have been taught and related the subject to their own gender-identity? [5] To answer these questions, a method of dealing with the material was needed whereby the expressions of the pupils themselves would remain intact. We found a solution in the form of collective essays. Per research group (women's history and 'traditional' history), a series of essays was compiled from the learning experiences written in the girls and boys own words. Sixteen essays were compiled in total. A differentiation was made between the teaching method used and the type of school (see notes 3 and 6) in both the group taught women's history and the group taught 'traditional' history. In the resulting eight groups, a girls' and a boys' collective essay were compiled. [6] The methodology of combining the answers to an open question to form a collective essay was derived from Jacques Janssen et al. (1989). We compiled the essays in the following way:

- in principle, every learning effect sentence reported was included in an essay, unless virtually the same sentence had been written by different pupils, in which case the

[5] I do realize that being a woman is not the only factor that influences a pupil's interpretation of the subject-matter. The ethnic background and socio-economic class of a pupil are also important. However, the ethnic and socio-economic mix of the pupils who participated in the research was not sufficiently varied to be able to draw any conclusions on the interrelationship between gender, ethnicitiy and class.

[6] The teaching method only seemed to have an influence on the learning experiences of women in the groups taught 'traditional' history.

sentence was only included once. Sentences with the same meaning but written in other words were included in the essay;

- the essays were divided into paragraphs on the basis of a differentiation we made between learning experiences reported by pupils in relation to 'the world' and learning experiences pertaining to 'themselves' (de Groot, 1980; van der Kamp, 1984). The first type of experience relates to the subject content of history (e.g. mass culture, clothing, pillarization, suffrage). The second type of learning experience pertains explicitly to the way in which a pupil relates to the subject. This involves reflecting on one's own place in the world (I have learnt that women's history is an exciting subject' or 'I have learnt that I do not like it if it is only about women');
- each paragraph begins with 'I have learnt (discovered/noticed) that'. This opening is omitted from subsequent sentences;
- each paragraph begins with the learning effect sentences quoted most by pupils;
- to make the essays easier to read, grammatical mistakes were corrected, any necessary punctuation added and some sentences combined in such a way as not to impair the meaning of the sentence.

The methodology of combining the learning reports of individual pupils to form a collective essay implies that the content of the essays is not consistent. Conflicting learning experiences are included in the same essay. Within the scope of this paper, I will concentrate on the essays by girls who were taught women's history.

5. Women's history: an enjoyable subject?

Before considering in detail the meaning of women's history for girls, I will briefly present the answers of pupils to the questions whether they thought the history lessons given within the framework of the research were enjoyable and whether they found the lessons difficult (on a scale of 1 to 5). The experience of girls and boys with women's history are presented in comparison to those with 'traditional' history.

The women's history lessons were appreciated more by girls than by boys. While 65% of the girls said that they had enjoyed or really enjoyed women's history, 38% of the boys were of the same opinion ($p=.00001$). A comparison with the group of pupils who were taught 'traditional' history, however, shows that girls also appreciated the subject content of those lessons more than boys: respectively 65% and 44% enjoyed or really enjoyed the lessons ($p=.00001$). Girls like history more than boys; women's history is not appreciated more than 'traditional' history or less than 'traditional' history as a subject by girls, which is the case with boys. They liked women's history slightly less than 'traditional' history ($p=.01042$).

Teaching women's history as opposed to 'traditional' history does not mean that girls found the subject easier. On the contrary, 21% of the girls find women's history an easy subject while 33% of the girls who had been taught 'traditional' history considered it to be easy (not statistically significant). More than half of the boys think that history is an easy subject (54%) regardless of whether they were taught women's history or 'traditional' history. (The difference between girls and boys is statistically significant; $p=.02195$ for women's history and $p=.00000$ for 'traditional' history.)

6. Girls on women's history

With help of the learner reports written by girls after the experiment we explored how women's history contributes to the gender-identity of girls. I will examine how the three levels of dealing with the position of women within the subject women's history are reflected in the individual interpretation of girls. I conceive this individual interpretation as

an element of gender-identity.

To give some insight into the data we collected, I will quote a few extracts from the essays by girls who followed the women's history lessons.

Essay 1

'I have learnt that women were in an oppressed position. They were extremely oppressed. In the past women were lower than men. They were inferior to men and were hardly allowed to do anything. Women were not allowed to do what they wanted (money and children). Women have a hard time behind them. They have had to fight tooth and nail for themselves. Women also had opponents who were against emancipation. There are still many different opinions on the oppression of women. Women have been subjugated and this has got to come to an end now. I have learnt what women were like in those times. I have noticed that it is unjust what happened in the past.

(...)

I have discovered that women changed during the period 1900-1929. Women have also done important things. They started to play an increasingly important role, they have grown with history. Women have acquired a much more important place in society. The times we now live in are pleasant and women and men have virtually equal rights.

I have learnt that not very much attention is/was paid to what women have done in the past. Women can be very important, for example during the First World War. They were then very involved in the quest for peace and that is not even in the textbooks.

(...) I cannot even start to imagine what the life of a housewife with fourteen children was like.

(...) I have noticed that boys do not / did not like this subject at all. Most boys think it is really boring, the girls too, actually. I do not think this is a very nice subject.

I have noticed that there are a lot of differences of opinion between boys and girls.

(...) It is all so overdone. (Teacher's name) even goes to a women's bookshop now. I think that is going too far and so emancipated.'

Essay 2

'(...)

I have noticed that women's history is enjoyable. Women's history is really interesting (perhaps because I am also a woman myself). I enjoy it when it's about women and not about all those wars etc. I thought it was a really nice subject. I was more interested in the lessons. History can really teach you a lot.'

Essay 3

'I have learnt that women have really fought for this and that they were used. Women did not have it easy then.

Officially they were not allowed to wear a swimming costume, but they did on the quiet. Now they are officially allowed to.

I have learnt how women finally got the right to vote. Women had to fight for it. Women's right to vote was an enormous breakthrough. They won. People (women) do not really think about it anymore, that they won.

I have learnt that women's history is a bit different. I found it really interesting. It is not really my subject but it has taught me a lot. When my father talks about it, once a year, at least I have got something to say, even though I did not really pay

attention because it was boring. I have noticed that I was pleased when the lesson was over. I did not like it.

I have noticed that I thought the subject went on for too long, some topics were interesting but there were one or two that I fell asleep in. (...)'

Essay 4

'I have learnt how things were done in the past in comparison to now. In the past, women's lives were very different to what they are now. I have learnt how women have developed from the beginning up until now. Times were not so good as now. A lot has changed in the lives of women; they were given the right to vote, they were allowed more, everything became more modern. There is progress in life. Men, some men, have not changed much. They, some of them, are still the same.

I have learnt that it was a difficult time for women; they were too busy, they were underpaid and so on. It was difficult for women in the past and they had no say in things. Women's lives were really difficult.

I have learnt that women can also stand up for themselves when they do not agree with men, and how. I also got to know more about everything that women have done by themselves.

I have discovered that women and men are equal. Women also worked in the past; they did not sit at home the whole day. Only rich people had to stay at home all day.

I have noticed that society was pillarized.

(...)

I have discovered that a topic which is only about women is enjoyable. I have learnt some things about the way in which women live that I did not know. I like this subject. I have learnt that I do not like the subject of women. It gets really boring when only women are discussed and it is a dull subject to learn. I did not like it at all. I liked the lessons that we had before much more. I have done more enjoyable and easier subjects than this. I began to think that history was even more stupid. All of a sudden history is not nice any more. (...)'

Summarizing, if we look at the content of the learning experiences reported by girls on women's history, the following view of history becomes apparent. 'The position of women has changed a lot. In the past women had a really difficult life. They were not allowed anything. They were oppressed and inferior to men. Women had to fight hard for their rights. They fought for the right to vote for everyone. The result is that women are now in many ways equal to men.'

In the individual interpretation of girls as expressed in these essays, the first level of dealing with the position of women is manifested as follows. Women's struggle for the right to vote for women particularly attracted the girls' attention. Women are frequently referred to in the essays as political actors. 'They have had to fight tooth and nail for themselves.' Or, 'I also got to know more about everything that women have done by themselves.'. The fight of women for their rights is, virtually without exception, regarded as positive. The perceptibility of women as political actors is important; it shows that 'women can also stand up for themselves when they do not agree with men, and how'. There is only one reference to the present inequality in the relationship between the sexes: 'there are still many different opinions on the oppression of women'. The majority of the girls made the link between the past and the present, which is so important in the development of identity, in the following way only: women's struggle is over ('They won').

The learner reports also show that the girls found women's lives interesting and worth studying (the second level); they have, I quote, 'got to know to know more about the life of women'. It is striking that the domains traditionally ascribed to women are not specifically mentioned in the essays: 'they were too busy' and 'it's about women and not about all those wars'. The only exception is, 'I cannot even start to imagine what the life of a housewife with fourteen children was like'. The association made between women and non-war comes up again in the sentences in connection with the value of women and their activities. 'Women can be very important, for example during the First World War. Then they were very involved in the quest for peace and that is not even in the textbooks.' Thus women's endeavours to stop World War I are interpreted positively by girls. Nel Noddings (1992) made the following comment on the association of women with peace: 'Pacifism, it seems, is respectable for women, but not for men.' (p.232) There is not a single reference in the essays to men and peace and the absence of their struggle for peace.

It can be concluded that our attempts in the teaching materials to point out the changes in meaning of the concept of femininity over the years were not very successful. Changes in the meaning of femininity in the period studied (the third level) are scarcely covered at all in the learning experiences. Of the many comments made by pupils on the process of emancipation, I could only find one or two references to these elements and then they are once again mostly interpreted in terms of (in)equality. ('Officially they were not allowed to wear a swimming costume, but they did on the quiet. Now they are officially allowed to.'). I could not find any evidence of the intended reflection on one's own present gender-identity in the learner-reports.

Girls have mainly interpreted women's history in terms of oppression and resistance. Women's history is understood as the history of a group in a disadvantaged position which is in the process of emancipating itself. *Equality*, not the differences between the sexes, is the central issue in this view of history: women are now equal or more equal to men than they were in the past. Emancipation in this sense is generally considered by girls to be positive.

In the discussion on women's history as a final examination subject, the suggestion has been made many times that women's history has a positive effect on girls' identification with the past. Few sentences in the essays, however, testify to this; the tone of the sentences was more detached. The few learning experiences in which girls do make a connection between women in the past and themselves as women today, are positive ('Women's history is really interesting, perhaps because I am also a woman myself') as well as ambivalent ('I cannot even start to imagine what my life would be like as a housewife with fourteen children'). One girl is totally negative about accentuating *differences* between the sexes as an element of emancipation ('"Teacher's name" even goes to a women's bookshop now. I think that's going too far and so emancipated').

7. Discussion

Not everything that teachers intend to teach pupils is learnt by pupils; and not everything that pupils learn is intended to be taught by teachers. The importance of evaluating education does, in fact, lie in these two observations. The first hypothesis has been the subject of far more research than the second. In our research, we assessed the lessons by letting pupils speak for themselves. What do they say they have learnt? What unexpected learning effects have occurred?

The learner reports show that the line of communication between teaching materials and pupils is not straightforward. What was taught was interpreted and transformed by the pupil. Apart from a few negative learning experiences ('It gets boring when only women are discussed'), the learner reports of girls comprise mainly neutrally or positively

formulated learning experiences [10]: 'women's history is worthwhile, it is good to know something about it, but luckily we are alive now, not then'. This appreciation is supported by the answers of girls on the question 'Did you enjoy women's history?' (see section 5). Changes in the position of women have mainly been measured against those of men in general and against those of women today. The learner reports reflect an optimistic interpretation of history: the ideal of equality of the sexes has been more or less realized. Virtually none of the girls identified themselves positively with differences between the sexes. If differences between the sexes do exist these should be abolished as soon as possible.

The following statements were expressed in various ways by girls in their learner reports: women are now allowed to do more than in the past', 'we live at a nice time now in which women and men have virtually the same rights'. The repetitive nature of this type of statement seems to indicate a magical formula. What this magical formula is meant to ward of is the threat of belonging to a group which in the eyes of girls (and boys) is associated with a 'deficiency'. Belonging to such a group undermines a carefully constructed image of equality.

The fear that a situation in which pupils who are forced to learn about women could lead to an anti-feminist attitude (Grever, 1991, p. 75), is not confirmed by the research. Nevertheless, teaching women's history has not clarified the unequal position of women and men at the present time. References to the present, other than those to the equality that has been achieved, are missing in practically all the essays. There is also little indication of positive reflection on the differences between the sexes in terms of equivalence. A possible explanation for this is that girls are disinclined to identify with 'a group that is lagging behind'. In closing, I would like to focus attention on a factor that has possibly reinforced this process.

Women's history is presented and taught as a separate theme. In the discussion preceding its introduction in secondary education, the subject women's history was continually related to the *needs of girls*, for example, the need for ways of expressing their identification. The emancipatory value of the subject-matter for boys and their view of the past and the present was scarcely discussed. A subject advocated specifically in the interests of girls/women tends to lose status and to result in stereotyping: in 'being different' girls require special attention (ten Dam & Volman, forthcoming). Girls have reacted to this by recognizing the existence of inequality between the sexes and at the same time referring to the archives. From this point of view, it is worth considering integrating women's studies in regular course books and removing the label women's history.

[10] All the paragraphs in the essays start with the learning effect sentences in which women's history is described as interesting; they are quoted most by pupils.

* English translation by Jean Vaughan

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